Framing Questions for Session 1:

Leadership Camp VIII: MONSTER

Monsters have inhabited innumerable cultural imaginations, a testament to the paradoxical human pleasure in envisioning beings that emerge from the recesses of our collective unknown: the dead, the disfigured, and the disgusting. They are also embodiments of cultural psychopathologies: religious dread, repressed shame, collective guilt, and xenophobia. We know these monsters well as myth and fiction.

But we also know monsters in reality: humans mapped onto the monstrous, bound into dehumanized shapes through variegated threads of colonial imperative and materialized projection. COVID-19's arrival in the US marked a sharp re-emergence of portrayals of East Asians with contagion, leading to a spike in hate crimes around the US. More recently, Surya Kant, India's Chief Justice, asserting that student activists were "cockroaches and parasites of society" implied that, like cockroaches, they were disgusting and should be crushed, legitimizing police violence towards protesters.

Against this backdrop, we would like to consider the theme of monstrosity in Asian American and Asian diasporic art today, over four sessions spread throughout Spring 2027. There are many directions this conversation could go, likely falling within or in proximity to two main threads:

First, there is material monstrosity: bodies in incommensurable excess and the aesthetics of resistance that challenge "good taste," including poetic melancholy and quiet suffering. Rage and menace become expressive tools, manifest in "unnatural" and ruined bodies, surfaces that turn the stomach and repel the gaze. Such visible horrors elicit affects that resist containment, while attesting to personal and political histories of damage and hybridity. This leads to the second thread: monstrous feelings. Drawing from recent scholarship, such as Summer Kim Lee's *spoilage*, Jasbir Puar's *monster*, Mel C. Chen's *"wrong" matter,* David S. Roh et al's *repellant bodies,* Sian Ngai's *irritation*, and Cathy's Park Hong's *minor feelings,* we will examine feelings of unsettlement and the inability to heal, by deliberately resisting social or emotional harmonization. These aesthetic acts elicit psychic inflammation, irritation, and a sense of wrongness; feelings that are monstrous in their inability to hew to comfortable binaries such as good/bad, beautful/ugly.

How can inhabiting monstrosity radicalize the social body? What are the pleasures of the monstrous, and how might they be characterized? What is monstrous art today? The specific focus of these discussions and the readings that inform them will be shaped by the interests of the selected cohort.

Leaders Bios:

Sreshta Rit Premnath is an artist from Bangalore living in Brooklyn and North Adams. Premnath's work examines the spaces between bodies and places as sites where care, responsibility, and political action emerge. He has had solo exhibitions at venues including Usdan Gallery, Bennington, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Contemporary Art Center Cincinnati, Institute of Contemporary Art San Diego, Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, Contemporary Art Gallery Vancouver, Nomas Foundation, Rome, Rodríguez Gallery Pozńan, Galerie Nordenhake, Berlin, and GALLERYSKE, Bangalore amongst others. He is the founding editor of Shifter, a platform that convened public discussions and produced topical publications from 2004-2021. He is Associate Professor of Art at Williams College.

Jen Liu is a Taiwanese American artist working in video, painting, biomaterial, and performance, looking at histories of labor, diasporic Asian identities, and technology's role in it all. Liu has presented work at MoMA, The Whitney Museum, The New Museum, The Kitchen, and Sculpture Center, New York; Royal Academy and ICA in London; Kunsthaus Zurich; Kunsthalle Wien; and has participated in the Shanghai, Singapore, and Taipei Biennials, and multiple Berlinales. She is a recipient of the Creative Capital Grant, LACMA Art + Technology Lab, Guggenheim Fellowship in Film/Video, \Art Award from Cornell Tech, Anonymous Was a Woman Award, NYSCA/NYFA Fellowship in Digital/Electronic Art, Pollock-Krasner Award, and the Hewlett 50 Arts Commission in Media Performance. Liu is an Associate Professor of Studio Art at Hunter College, NYC.